

“Winning at Conflict” // Matthew 19:3–12; James 4:1–5 // Forever Family #5

The **big idea** in this series is that **what Jesus taught about marriage in Matthew 19** not only revolutionizes marriage but also everything connected to marriage. **We’ve looked at things like singleness, dating, sex; divorce.**

Today, we’re going to look at how what Jesus taught about marriage in Matthew 19 impacts how we engage in conflict resolution.

To review: In Matthew 19 Jesus taught us a few important things about marriage. First, he taught us that **Marriage is permanent.**

- **Marriage is an indissoluble covenant dissolvable only by death.** In marriage, you lock the door and take divorce off the table as an option.
- Divorce should be as radical and rare as amputation, because that’s basically what it is.
- That has profound implications for conflict resolution. Because if you take divorce off the table as an option, you end up figuring out that a lot of your irreconcilable differences suddenly become reconcilable. **I know that from experience.** Necessity is the mother of invention, right? If I know I’ve got to live with you for the next 40 years, we find a way to get along.
- Remember: Jesus’ teaching on the permanence of marriage was so strong that his disciples were like, *“Dang, Jesus. If that’s the case, it’s probably better to never get married.”* **And Jesus said,** “Yep, and if you’re going to make it you’ll need my help.”

Works Consulted:

“Conflict in the Family,” Andy Stanley

“How to Have a Good Fight,” Danielle Sallade

“To Argue or Not to Argue?” article, Brad Hambrick

“Sinful Things to Say in Conflict,” Lore Ferguson Wilbert

Second, Jesus taught in Matthew 19 that earthly **Marriage is not ultimate.**

- In Matt 19, in this teaching on marriage, Jesus pronounces a blessing on eunuchs, who could never get married or have biological family, saying they were still full recipients of God’s blessings in his forever family.
- In so doing, he **refuted the idea popular then, and today**, that marriage and sex are essential to a happy life.
- That has implications for conflict, too, because, as I’ll show you today, our conflict often arises from the fact that we **look to marriage** for some things we ought to be getting from God.

Finally, Scripture teaches us that one of **marriage’s primary purposes is to teach us to love like God loves us, which means loving sinful people** (**Marriage teaches us to love like God loves**)

- Paul Tripp said this last week: *If marriage and family are primarily about making life smooth and happy, then God chose a really terrible plan!* Let’s have one messed-up sinner with a bunch of issues join together with another messed-up sinner with a bunch of issues, and then into that ball of crazy let’s bring other little sinners who will take crazy to new levels.
- That sounds like **a recipe for conflict!**
- But, as we’ve said, **God’s purpose in marriage** is not just to make us happy in a companion, but to **make us holy by teaching us to love like he loves.**

So, today we look at conflict. **One thing we all have in common is that in our families we experienced conflict.** Regardless of your family structure--whether you are married, single, single-again, part of an extended family, or in a small group here at church, you experience conflict on the reg.

And what makes it even more complicated is that we **all have different styles of conflict** that we bring to the relationship, and this just confuses everybody.

- **Some of you are the peacemaker**, which means what you most want in your relationships is harmony. So whatever happens, you are always trying to move the needle back to harmony. **Your attitude is basically**, “Hey, if you’re happy, I’m happy!” **Which seems great, except when it makes you paper over issues** that really ought to be dealt with. For **those of you into this kind of thing, think Enneagram 9’s** who are sometimes unwilling to do the hard work necessary to create a good relationship: Let’s just get back to harmony. Probably a better name for them is the Peace **FAKER**.
- **Others of you are the sulker, which means** when someone close to you hurts you, you start to sulk until they figure out what they did and rectify it. It’s like you turn your whole house into one of those escape-room games where everyone else has to figure out what they did to you, with no help from you. **Anybody married to one of those?**
 - Don’t raise your hand. You’ll pay for that for the next week.
- **Then there’s the stuffer** (This is the person who just constantly stuffs anger and conflict down into their heart. You ask them, “Is everything ok?” And they answer, “Yes! I’m fine, I’m fine!”) But everybody can see the little text bubbles above your head with curse words in it. And where you spit the grass withers.
- **Others of you are the litigator**: Which means in conflict you are a good arguer and can usually prove in whatever situation that you are not in the wrong. It’s not that you can’t admit you are wrong; just that in your mind you are legitimately never wrong. **So, you’re a blessing to live with.**
 - **BTW, have you fellow litigators** figured out yet that when you win an argument at home you don’t really win anything? **In other places, if you win an argument**, there’s a reward. **Win in a courtroom** or at the office or with a customer service rep

and you usually get some benefit--I kind of pride myself on the things I’ve extracted from TWC because I can usually out-argue whoever is on the other end of the line--but if you win an argument at home, you don’t really win anything. Conflict is **so emotional and complicated** that winning the argument does not actual win in the relationship.

- **Finally, we have the screamer**. This is the person who, **when something goes wrong**, they just get it out at full volume.
 - **BTW, I’ve noticed that it seems that people** who come from families who were screamers always marry people who didn’t, and so when you have your first fight, the one who is a screamer can’t figure out why the one who isn’t a screamer won’t engage, and the non-screamer is looking at the screamer thinking, “**Demon, come out!**”

Here’s what we’re going to do today: We’re going to use Jesus’s half-brother James to teach us one really important concept about conflict, one that when you get it, will fundamentally change how you engage in conflict.

And then I want to **outline for you some guidelines** for Christ-like conflict.

And then, finally, I want to bring up one of our Pastors, Brad Hambrick, who also teaches over in the counseling department at Southeastern Seminary and have him give us some guidance on what to do when we are experiencing conflict.

First, a game-changing principle to learn about conflict. Again, it comes from James, Jesus’ half-brother in James 4.

- **And honestly, who would know more about family conflict** and strife than Jesus’ own brother?
- Can you imagine growing up in a home with the Son of God as your older brother? **He gets out of bed** in the morning with a fresh breath and a smile on his face; somehow, **magically, his bed is made perfectly**; he always does his homework. He eats his

vegetables with joy and without complaining. You are pretty sure he's doing something to the water over there that makes his water taste better than yours, but you can't prove it.

- **Seriously, how many times must James have heard, 'Why can't you be more like your brother?'**

So, **James knows what he's talking about** when it comes to conflict that arises from jealousy, methinks.

Here's the principle: *Intense, heated conflict usually involves idolatry in both parties.* **When you have conflict with someone**, I'm not saying both parties are equally in the wrong, just that when a conflict **gets heated to the point that it leads** to relational fracture, it often involves idolatry. And if you want to deal with it, you start there. **Let me show you what I mean.**

James 4:1–3, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?"

This is a good question, right? If I were to ask you what was causing conflict and strife in your life right now, most of you would probably point to someone near you and say, "**Easy. Them!**"

- You'd be pointing at a parent, a spouse, a kid.
- Or maybe you'd be thinking about a friend or boss or small group member.

But James says, "**Think deeper.**" *"Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. But you do not have, because you do not ask."*

(BTW, James is **writing to church people**, so 'murder' here is likely **metaphorical**. He's using **hyperbole**. Think of it as rage, or willingness to destroy a relationship).

What causes that? **Your passions.** There is something that you want, something that you think that you are entitled to, and this person is keeping you from it, and so you despise them for it.

- **For example, I'm sitting at the table**, and my wife is late coming home to switch places with me with the kids so I can go out and get some errands done. So I'm fuming. In a rage. Why am I mad? She is keeping me from what I wanted to do this afternoon. I'm not saying she is not doing something wrong. But I need to acknowledge that **the anger, the rage**, is coming from the fact that she is depriving me of something I feel like I'm entitled to.
- **You say, "My husband just does not understand or appreciate the work** that I do for this family every day. He comes home thinking about his needs and only his needs and is totally oblivious to mine. And it makes me furious."
- "My spouse is the **most sexually selfish person on the planet**. He or she is just not thinking about what I need or want or deserve."

What creates the intensity in those situations is that you are not getting what you want!

Scholars say that phrase, "passions are at war within you," is an OT illusion to idolatry.

An idol is something that takes the place of God in your life.

(Most of us think, "I'm not an idolater," because we think idolatry primarily means bowing down to little gold statues, and you don't have any of those.

- **A couple of years ago my wife and I went to Athens, Greece.** They literally had temples to idols on every corner... My wife had always said she wanted me to take her because she said that when I took my shirt off I reminded her of a Greek god
- **Artemis:** goddess of prosperity, money (worship by bringing your best)

- **Nike:** the goddess of victory, worshipped by athletes and warriors (athletes would offer crown)
- **Aphrodite:** goddess of sexuality, beauty (worshipped by having sex with prostitutes at temple)
- **My fav: Cloacina** the goddess of the sewer system. Not sure who worshipped her or exactly how you make an offering to her. We light a candle in our bathroom, maybe that's an offering.
- And we say, "Well, I don't worship anything like that, so I'm not an idolater."

But that's not what idolatry is.) **An idol is anything that takes the place of God in your life.** It is something that controls you. Something that you depend on for life and happiness. Something that without it, you'd feel like life would not be worth living.

And James says, "**When conflict gets heated in your heart, it is because you have determined something is so important to your life that you can't function without it, and that makes you furious at the person who is not giving it to you.**"

Notice what James says next: **"But you do not have because you do not ask."**

- **Where should you first take your needs?** God.
- As we've said throughout this series--God may use marriage to fulfill some of our needs, but he is still the one in charge of meeting them.
- If I am a true servant of God, and I have a need that is not being met, the first place I turn is him.
- **Ultimately I trust him**, not my spouse, as the one who meets my needs.
- That other person hasn't displaced God as the primary source or vehicle of the meeting of my needs.

James takes this even a step further! But some of **3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people!**

- **He says, "Some of you know to pray, but even when you pray, you pray as an idolater."** And then he compares us to adulterers, because idolatry and adultery have a lot in common. What happens in adultery? One spouse finds certain delights in someone else he should be finding in his spouse. Spiritual adultery is when you find happiness and security in other things that you ought to find in God.
- So how do you pray like an adulterer? **E.g. think of a man saying to his wife....** "You're supposed to find those things in me!"
- **You pray like an adulterer** when the joy and peace of your heart is dependent on God giving you some answer:
 - *God I can't be happy unless he talks about me this way.*
 - *God I can't be happy unless we make this amount of money.*
 - *God I can't hold my head up and feel good about myself unless my kids turn out a certain way...*
 - *God I can't be happy unless I have this level of freedom.*
 - God would say, "You spiritual adulterer. Why aren't I enough for you?"
 - **This happened to me early-on in praying for this church.** *"God, please bless the church and make it grow to this size. I can't be happy unless the church is this big, or I'm making this kind of money."*
 - **And then one day God said, Why aren't I enough for you, you spiritual adulterer.**
 - And here's what was happening in my relationships: as long as my happiness and security was dependent on a certain amount of success or making a certain amount of money, I had all kinds of personal conflicts here, because I was mad--soul-mad--at people letting me down or getting in the way.

So, the point is: What takes conflicts to a **heated, relationship-killing** level is that **this person is keeping you from getting** what you want,

what you are entitled to, what controls your emotions and is essential to you for a happy, fulfilled life.

So, the **first way to de-escalate any conflict** is to acknowledge that, and to **turn back to God**: You say, “*God, ultimately I trust you to meet my needs, not them. This person or these people may be a vehicle for you to do that, but ultimately I trust in you.*”

And then, you may still confront the person for their wrong, but it won't be from this desperate, raging, you-have-attacked-me at-my core place.

I love these promises:

- **Isa 26:3**, “I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed upon you.” When your mind is fixed upon God, trusting him to meet your needs, you will have perfect peace, even in conflicts.
- **Phil 4:6**, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” See what's happening? I'm looking to God first for my needs. I'm not wholly dependent on this person for my personal needs. I'm dependent on God. And that **gives me a peace that passes all understanding** even in the midst of conflict.

Jesus had plenty of interpersonal conflicts with people--if you read the Gospels you'll see he gets in a surprising amount of arguments--Jesus is doing **2 primary things** in the Gospels, **eating and arguing, I love that**--but his conflicts were always *loving* conflicts. Selfless conflicts. Conflict done from a place of perfect, personal peace; conflicts that confronted the wrong without escalating the confrontation to relationship-killing levels.

So what does **Christ-like confrontation** look like? I've **put together a little list** compiled from various places in the Bible:

1. Christ-like confrontation overlooks a lot

Proverbs 19:11 It is to a man's glory to overlook an offense.

Proverbs 12:16 The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the wise ignores many insults. **A fool is short-fused**. They have to comment on everything.

Ever been around somebody like this? They can't let anything go.

The wise, by contrast, let a lot go.

- **In marriage, I always think of this in terms of tennis**. Imagine marriage as you and your partner standing apart from each other over the net hitting love balls back and forth to each other. But one of you gets a little upset so you put a little spice on it. And your partner can say, “Oh, is this what we're doing?” and return it with even a little more spice. And back and forth... eventually you are **at the net pounding the ball at each other** as hard as you can. A better strategy is for the first partner to just let it go and re-serve. **Proverbs says, “That's what the wise man does for many conflicts!”**

BTW, this would not apply to things that do lasting damage to your relationship. **We'll talk about that in a minute**. Or any kind of abuse. On the contrary, **when you see someone doing something** that causes long-term damage to them or to your relationship, the **loving thing to do is confront them**. It may be easier just to keep the peace, but out of love for them you have to speak up.

Wisdom is knowing the difference: when to let it go and when to speak up. In the words of that **immortal theologian, Kenny Rogers**, “The secret to surviving, son, is knowing what to throw away, and knowing what to keep. You gotta know when to hold 'em, know when

to fold 'em; know when to walk away; know when to run..." And that's all I've got to say about that.

2. Christ-like confrontation is gentle

- **Gal 6:1** says, "If a person is overtaken in a fault... restore them gently." What does 'gently' mean? Lovingly. Respectfully. NOT selfishly.
- Here's a **litmus test**: Are you **excited to confront them**? If so, stop, you're in sin. That's not gentle.
- Here's a **few practical tips**:
 - In confrontation, use "I" language about your feelings rather than "you" language about their actions.
 - For example, rather than saying, "You hurt me," say, "I was hurt."
 - Or, instead of "You're never at home," say, "I want to spend more time with you."
 - Just phrasing it that way can trigger **compassion** in their heart rather than **self-defense** maneuvers.
 - Avoid superlatives (always, never). Don't say, "You always do that," or "You never do this," because superlatives escalate the problem to something fundamentally wrong with them. It's **not gentle**.
 - In the same way: Attack the problem, not the person. Gentle confrontation is done with respect. For every one statement about what is wrong, make five describing what is right about them that you love and appreciate. Avoid all sarcasm and name-calling.
 - **Also, related to this**: Resolve one problem at a time. If **while you're talking about that issue,** another one comes up, write that down as issue #2 and come back to it later. *Avoid piling-on.*
 - **Here's one more**: Avoid confronting your spouse publicly. Ladies, there's nothing that shuts a man down like having his wife tear him down to someone else. **Spouses can disagree in public**: "UVA is the best basketball program because they won

the national championship last year." No, "UNC is because they have SIX National Championships." But when disagreement gets to the point of confrontation, that should be reserved for private spaces.

- **Christ-like confrontation is gentle.** Let me prove that with one quick illustration: In Matthew 21, right after Jesus' most expressive time of anger, the lame and the blind (the most vulnerable) felt safe to approach him. That means even in his fiercest confrontations there was a spirit of gentleness about him.

3. Christ-like confrontation listens twice as much as it talks

- **James 1:19-20** "Be slow to speak, quick to hear, slow to anger."
- **Proverbs 18:13**: "He who gives an answer before he hears (listens fully), it is a folly and a shame."
- This is **exactly what some of you do**, especially you men.
 - **Our own Brad Hambrick** here says, "The vast majority of communication problems are not expression problems, they are listening problems."
 - **Let me offer you some remedial help on listening (and I need these too, because I am so bad at these things)**:
 - **First of all,** Be a servant listener: Seek first to understand, and only secondly to be understood!
 - Don't interrupt. Take turns and make sure they have a chance to express themselves fully. **Interrupting says** 'my thoughts are more important than your thoughts.'
 - **James says 'be quick to listen,'** but he doesn't say, 'Listen in a hurry.'
 - If you don't know what to say, ask questions.
 - If you still don't know what to say, ask more questions.
 - If you still don't know what to say after that, just repeat what the other person said back to them.
 - **Because a lot of times what the person most wants is for you to see and hear them.** To know you feel their pain even if you can't fix it.

- **BTW, I didn't learn this in my marriage;** I learned it from a guy at **DELTA**. (I look in there: "my man")
- One last one: **Don't give premature advice**. Because, first you will probably misread the situation.
- And second, a lot of times what the person is looking for is a companion in her pain, not a solution to her problem.
- So **don't interrupt her and explain away her pain** with **Aristotilean logic**: $A=b, b=c, \text{ ergo } a=c...$ *ergo* it's really illogical that you feel hurt. **When you do that, I can promise you she won't go**, *"Huh. Thank you. You know, I'm so stupid sometimes. I could have sworn I was offended and hurt, but now I see, by clear force of your logic, that I am not really hurt after all! I am SO THANKFUL you're my husband."* SAID NO WOMAN EVER.
- *The majority of communication problems are not expression problems, but listening problems.*

4. Christ-like confrontation owns its own part of the problem

- When you become **aware of any way you were wrong**, even how your idolatries contributed to the problem, apologize for it. W/o qualification.
 - **"If you say, 'I'm sorry, but...'** then you aren't apologizing.
 - Real apologies don't move from 'I'm sorry' to 'But ...' but go from 'I'm sorry' to 'How can I make it better.' They
- And don't say that you are the one who made me do this. No. The other person is guilty of their sin and will answer to God for it, but you were in charge of your own reaction.
- **BTW: This is one of the reasons why you need outside counsel in your life**, because other people can help you see your own sin when your own emotions have clouded your vision. When your emotions are engaged, you always see yourself 100% in the right and not at fault..

- **Veronica and I both have poured out the frustration** we have with each other to a friend and had that friend say, *"That's ridiculous. You're an idiot. Let that go."*

5. When at fault, Christ-like confrontation practices the 3 A's: **Admit, Apologize and Ask for Forgiveness**

- **Admit**: key here is be specific, what exactly are you sorry for? Not just "sorry."
 - **If you can't be specific**, then you don't understand what you did enough to change.
- **Apologize**: once again, be specific and
- **Ask for forgiveness**. This puts you in a posture of humility and that posture will do more to diffuse conflict than just about anything else.

6. Christ-like confrontation is quick to forgive

- In conflict, **you demonstrate what you believe about the gospel**.
- The **core of Christianity is being overwhelmed** by the forgiveness of the gospel; realizing that you have sinned against God way more than you've ever sinned against someone else.
- And the **forgiveness God has given you is so overwhelming** that you gladly and easily forgive others.
 - **When you refuse to forgive your spouse or his or her sins**, *you are in effect saying that their sin against you is worse than your sin against God*. Really?
- Furthermore, **God's forgiveness is supposed** to seem like such an **incredible treasure that every other infraction** in your life seems trivial compared to it:
 - **John Wesley said discovering the gospel** was like learning about a rich uncle you didn't know about who had left you an inestimable fortune: say 10 billion dollars, and as you are riding to the bank to collect it, when you get about a mile from it, one of your carriage wheels break off... Do you swear and curse God? You hardly notice, skipping and running the rest of the way to the bank to collect your treasure!

- **How much people's grievances** against you really bother you show you how little you are enraptured by the gospel.
- **For many of us, the one thing you most need is for the cross to become bigger** in our lives. The reason you can't forgive is the cross is so small in your life. It seems trivial.
- **You act like their wrong against you has ruined your world.** Really? You have been reconciled to God and been given an eternity of glorious promises.

Sometimes you don't want to forgive because you feel like forgiving somehow minimizes their sin, or you are doing a disservice to our feelings or betraying your own heart. **I have good news for you.** **Psalm 56:8 says that** God holds every one of our tears in his very capable hands. *Forgiving someone is not doing a disservice to yourself or to the accused. It is only magnifying God's grace.*¹

7. Christ-like confrontation is wise and patient in the timing of confrontation

- **Proverbs 12:18:** *"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."* "Rash words" can mean "words spoken in anger," but it can also mean "words not given at the right time."
- **Proverbs 25:11,** "Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances."
- Gentle, Christ-like confrontation is **sensitive to timing.**
- **Veronica and I have found it helpful** sometimes just to punt conversations until different times of the day. **If we're tired,** or **it's late,** that's not a good time for constructive confrontation.
- We **sometimes practice the "24 hour rule."** "I promise to come back to this."
- Now, men, you have to **keep your word** if you do this, otherwise you lose credibility.

- You say, **"What about that verse, 'Don't let sun go down on your wrath?'** Doesn't that mean we have to deal with our anger before we go to bed?
 - It can't mean literally before the sun goes down because that would mean some people in Sweden could nurse their grievances for **3 months in the summer** before dealing with it...
 - **The main point of that verse is that we need to deal with our wrath and vengeance and get it out of our hearts.** Sometimes a little time can help us separate unrighteous, selfish irritation from righteous, loving, anger.
- **BTW, wait until you can go face-to-face.** NEVER TEXT, EMAIL or SNAPCHAT A CONFLICT! I know so many people whose lives and relationships have been ruined by **indiscriminate emails.**
 - (Harvard study: In an emotional conversation, 7% of what you believe about communication is relayed through content; 38% through facial expression; 55% through body language.²

8. Christ-like confrontation brims with gospel hope

- For many people, conflicts spiral downward because there is an overtone of despair that pervades them. This relationship is never going to work. **You're too broken,** or **maybe I am.**
- But friend, **through the cross, I know he can cleanse every sin, and through the power of resurrection, God can restore anything** that's been broken.
- **This hope, btw, has gotten V and I through some tough times.** We know that God appointed us to be together, that he will supply the grace we need for anything he's assigned us to.
- **What some of you most need is the power of hope in your life. Illus. The power of hope.** There is a legendary experiment in which a researcher was trying to determine how long it would take a rat to drown. They found that if you just threw the rats into the water, they would drown between **10 minutes.** But if he took

¹ Sinful Things to Say in Conflict. LORE FERGUSON WILBERT | APR 3, 2019

² In, *Never Split the Difference.* Face to face conversations are always best for Creativity, Conflict, or Confidence building

them out 2–3 times and put them back in, the rats developed a sense of hope, and some of them could swim for more than **60 hours**. Changing no factor except the introduction of hope gave the rats the ability to swim more than 100x longer!³

- **There is one factor that, if we could introduce it into your marriage**, would do more to strengthen it than anything else, and that is *hope*.
- **That hope comes from knowing that God has a plan for your marriage**, even the difficult parts of it, and that he died to make a good marriage possible.
 - If having a good marriage were possible in your own strength, he **wouldn't have had to die**.
 - But because he did die and raise from the dead, **anything is possible** and nothing is too far gone. As the writer of Hebrews says, "He is able to save to the uttermost anyone who comes to God through him."
 - That means he can save your messed up marriage if you both give him a chance!
- **Before you give up on your marriage, give the power of grace a chance**. You have irreconcilable differences? The cross is God's answer to irreconcilable differences. **Give it a chance before you give up**.

Well, as I mentioned at the beginning, I want to press in a little on this idea of conflict with one of our pastors, **Dr. Brad Hambrick**, one of our staff members, who also teaches in the counseling department at Southeastern Seminary. **He's written lots of articles about** these things, but particularly one that is relevant to this topic is: [To Argue or Not to Argue: Conflict Resolution \(from Safe to Dangerous\)](#)

Welcome Brad! (originally, big applause; KY)

³ <http://www.psychosomaticmedicine.org/content/19/3/191.full.pdf>,
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7e17/2997570d70507653177172061c3b9edff627.pdf>.

- **What's the big idea behind this article? What's the biggest misconception you're trying to debunk?**
 - Most of us choose our approach to conflict based on our personality.
 - Then we find a Bible verse that matches our personality.
 - In order to apply the Bible well we must be self-aware and assess a situation correctly.
 - Knowing our full breadth of biblical options helps us grow in these ways.
- **Help us understand the most frequent style of conflict, "confess as we address." How do we do that well?**
 - This should be our most frequent style of conflict.
 - The more and better we "confess as we address" the less the more difficult styles of conflict will be needed.
 - The big idea is that we want to model the response we want the other person to mirror.
 - The person introducing conflict resolution (not the same thing as just introducing conflict) has an opportunity to shape the atmosphere around that interaction.
 - "Confess as we address" allows us to be the best possible stewards of that influence.
- **When does dishonor (garden variety conflict) become dangerous (abusive)? What are key markers when self-protection is more important than conflict resolution?**
 - Let's think of it in two ways: (1) effect and (2) motive.
 - Effect – what resulted from the action. If I throw a punch, how fast was my fist moving and how big is the hole in the wall?

- Motive – what was the desired effect of my action?
Even if I swing and miss, my heart is not safer for you.
 - Understanding the motive of abusive behavior helps us realize what is most important to look for in the effect.
 - The motive of abusive behavior is power and control. I want my way (power) and I want to be in charge (control).
 - From your sermon, for the abusive person its not that they have an idol – like respect – which they treat like God. It’s that they are their idol. They want the power and control, like God.
 - This helps us know what to look for. We’re not primarily looking for holes in the wall, measuring decimal levels, or keeping tally marks for foul-degrading words.
 - We’re looking for “is this person establishing a pattern of power and control which reduces the freedom of the other person.”
- **How do we think well about forgiveness and trust?**
 - Let’s use a simple metaphor for forgiveness – canceling a debt.
 - Jesus canceled the greatest debt for us, so how could we not cancel the lesser of another person?
 - But canceling another debt is not the same thing as giving another loan (trust) or starting a new business together (reconciliation).
 - Our forgiveness (a) shows appreciation for Christ’s forgiveness to us, (b) gives us emotional freedom from an offense, and (c) serves as an invitation to wise-righteous living by the other person.
 - God calls us to forgive.
 - When it comes to trust and reconciliation Jesus says “you will know then by their fruit” before you give a new loan or start another business together.
 - God’s call to forgive is not a call to be duped or easily manipulated.
- **Based on the relationship of trust and forgiveness, what are the byproducts of being unwilling to grant wise forgiveness?**
 - Psychologists have done health studies on unforgiveness.
 - Unforgiveness results in things like anxiety, higher blood pressure, symptoms of depression, a weaker immune system, and strain on your heart health.
 - Unforgiveness also results in greater details in the memory of our pain.
 - When we don’t forgive, we rehearse the offense. Repetition is the key to memory.
 - Forgive and forget may be an urban legend, but forgive and fade is a real possibility that is good medicine for our physical, mental, and spiritual health
- **What are the key markers that “safe conflict” is going sour? What are the red flags of conflict that are the best predictors that a marriage is moving towards divorce?**
 - Researcher John Gottman has identified the four best (meaning worst) predictors of divorce
 - Criticism – attacking the person instead of the problem
 - Contempt – responding to the person with disdain or condescension
 - Defensiveness – refusing to own our contributions to the conflict
 - Stonewalling – refusing to engage constructive conflict and using distance to punish Your sermon hit on all these points
 - Gottman’s research didn’t “discover” anything. It empirically verified what the Bible has been telling.
 - That’s a good thing IF it motivates us to take our obedience to God and honoring of others more seriously.

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- **If a couple is in trouble, what would some wise next steps be?**
 - Don't hurt alone.
 - Talk to a friend or pastor now. Isolation is a microphone to pain and dysfunction.
 - For counseling resources go to summitrdu.com/counseling for a variety of options
 - Don't wait until things get "that bad."
 - This is the barrier to taking the first step.
 - If you wait until things are clearly "that bad" then you're in a crisis and making rushed decisions of profound consequences in a disrupted emotional state. Please don't do that.
 - "Kinda bad" is more than enough to at least start talking to a mutually trusted friend.

